



## Research-Based Practice

The 2003 legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to evaluate the cost-benefit of “research-based” prevention and early intervention programs. WSIPP found that “some prevention and early intervention programs for youth can give taxpayers a good return on their dollar,” and that “there is credible evidence that certain well-implemented programs can achieve significantly more benefits than costs”. WSIPP’s findings included a list of programs that they evaluated –programs whose research included randomly assigned control groups – and detailed the cost-benefits of each. Of these programs, only four were found to be cost-beneficial in regards to child abuse and neglect prevention.

WCPCAN strongly supports the idea of investing in programs proven to be cost-effective and that have research behind them. WCPCAN also supports investing in programs that are promising, i.e. those that are based on research and achieving outcomes that can be documented, but may not yet have benefited from the type of control group research recognized by WSIPP. Our commitment to achieving an appropriate mix of ‘proven’ and ‘promising’ takes into account the following considerations.

- Research-based programs are often very expensive to implement. Many community-based agencies cannot afford the training and implementation costs associated with these types of programs.
- The effectiveness of many research-based programs with diverse populations is unclear. The local adaptations that sometimes make programs successful in specific populations are often not permitted under the strict protocols that guide many proven programs.
- As a field, child abuse and neglect prevention research lags behind others. For instance, many more crime and substance abuse prevention programs have received the focus and resources necessary to achieving ‘proven’ status than have programs addressing child abuse and neglect. The relative scarcity of solid child abuse and neglect prevention research creates the risk of over-investing in ‘one size fits all’ programs. It also speaks to the need to keep promising programs in the pipeline for future research, and for more investment in research.
- There are various types of credible research. Some programs cannot be evaluated in the way detailed by WSIPP. This does not mean that those programs are not effective.
- Some benefits cannot be monetized in WSIPP’s cost-benefit model. Those benefits still exist, produce positive outcomes for children and their families -- and may in fact be critical to achieving the measures used by WSIPP to determine a program’s cost-effectiveness. (For example, parent-child bonding.)

WCPCAN supports the state’s efforts to invest more in research-based programs. However, there are many other factors that must be considered before making a decision about the best way to make those investments.